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ABSTRACT

School policy which emphasizes the placement of handicapped children in the regular classroom has received acclaim both as a step toward equity and as an attempt to improve the academic learning and social adjustment of handicapped students. Although new teachers entering the system are better prepared than ever before to face the difficulties posed by handicapped students, their skills may be little valued by the old system. Most teachers presently employed have received little training in the competencies needed for effective mainstreaming. Consequently, both new and old educational personnel experience stress with regard to mainstreaming efforts. Three stages of adapting to stress (alarm, resistance, and exhaustion) and three classes of responses to stress (direct action, cognitive reappraisal, and anxiety) have been identified. The educational system can reduce the stress of mainstreaming by providing increased training, de-emphasizing procedural requirements, facilitating placement and re-placement decisions, and providing information to influence teacher expectations. Teachers themselves can reduce stress by knowing their own standards and limits, analyzing their view of the instrumental role, and establishing a teaching team. In summary, the process of adapting to the stress produced by mainstreaming can be facilitated by effective procedures within the educational system and by the teachers' cognitive reappraisal of their role, the students and their potential, and instructional procedures. (NB)

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Mainstreaming Handicapped Children

And Its Effect On Teacher Adaptation To Stress

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of the American Psychological Association

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The Mainstreaming Movement

Since the passage of PL 94-142 The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, emphasis on the placement of handicapped children in the regular classroom, wherever possible, has become official policy of most school districts. This policy has received wide acclaim not only as a step toward equity and justice but as a positive attempt to improve the academic learning and social adjustment of handicapped learners. Perhaps the position of most educators of the mid 70's was reflected in the comments of Blatt:

> "There remain too many children who are excluded or exempted or suspended from public schools; there remain too many children who are institutionalized but do not require institutionalization; there remain too many children who are denied both the school and clinic". (1972, p. 537).

The policy of placing handicapped children in regular classrooms or the least restrictive environment available, was believed necessary to the remediation of these ills.

Mainstreaming and Teacher Preparation

The effects of mainstreaming however, have only recently begun to be analyzed, and some researchers have suggested that there are several questions and issue that should have been previously considered. Strain and Kerr (1981) in a review of studies of teachers' attitudes toward mainstreamed children suggest that regular classroom teachers are generally less favorable than special educators in their opinion of handicapped children and of the concept of mainstreaming itself. Hohn and Brownlee (1984) found that school principals believe that special education teachers should have major responsibility for handicapped learners with regular classroom teachers serving only a minimal role. While teachers perceived their role as more instrumental in the education of handicapped learners than did principals in that study, only 25% of those interviewed were able to identify the instructional objectives for their particular students or even had copies of the

individualized educational plan. Cruickshank (1983) believes that too little time or thought was given to the policy's impact on the teacher of the regular classroom, or the other children in the class, or the parents of the normal children of the classroom. He argues that most teachers, principals and other educational personnel are poorly prepared for the complexities introduced into the classroom by the presence of a handicapped child. He asks:

> "Where have teachers learned how to cope with the very issues which a decade ago sent these children to a self-contained classroom? We need to recognize that the regular classroom may be the most restrictive placement when an unprepared teacher is in charge". (1983, pp. 195-196).

In fact, the law did not provide well for the in-service training of educational personnel already functioning in the public schools. Through the Dean's Grants Projects, in the late 70's and 80's federal funds were provided for the training of prospective teachers. To date, almost every state and a majority of the nation's teacher training institutions have received some financial support for improved pre-service training programs (Reynolds, 1982). New teachers are entering the field better prepared than ever before to face the difficulties Cruickshank describes. On the other hand, except for a few, scattered in-service programs, most presently employed teachers have received little training in the competencies necessary for mainstreaming to occur effectively.

Mainstreaming as a Source of Stress

As a result, new teachers enter an educational system with skills that are either misunderstood, ignored or little valued. Such a situation is ready made for the occurrence of stress. Teachers and administrators already in the field are also in stress-generating positions as they confront the challenge of new ideas and attitudes held by sometimes naïve newcomers, as well as the legal and administrative fiats handed down to them from remote judicial and legislative authorities. Many may feel that the needs of handicapped learners are

legitimate ones and that the mainstreaming rationale is valid. They still must face the reality of 25 or more other students and their parents however, and may feel compelled to focus their efforts on the majority's concerns.

Adaptation to Stress

Thus, both new and old educational personnel experience stress in regards to mainstreaming efforts. We should remember that Selye (1956) originally conceived of adaptation to stress as a natural biological function, or a general adaptation syndrome. Whether the final outcome of experiencing stress is positive or negative depends upon the effectiveness of the coping mechanisms utilized in adapting to its occurrence.

Selye described three stages in the sequence of adapting to stress - Alarm, Resistance and Exhaustion. The Exhaustion stage which appears to be similar to the present-day terminology of "burn-out" occurs only when resistance to the threat posed requires more of the individual than he is capable of giving, leading to a failure of psychological defenses (Shontz, 1975). Recent research suggests that at this stage, damage to the immune system may also occur, resulting in physical illness or even death (Maier and Laudenslager, 1985).

Exhaustion is not pre-ordained however. Most individuals are able to adapt to stress-producing situations (stressors) by resisting their effects. The key to stress adaptation is thus the stage of Resistance in which the individual responds to the awareness of what it is that is causing the threat or conflict (the Alarm Stage) (Selye, 1956).

Resistance is characterized by secondary appraisal, or the process of assessing the effectiveness of one's adaptive activity. Favorable appraisal results in continuing a course of action, unfavorable appraisal brings about changes in adaptation. Lazarus (1966) proposed that the individual has essentially three classes of responses available to him: 1) direct action, 2) cognitive reappraisal

and 3) anxiety. Direct action includes behavior that attacks or avoids the threatening agent. In human behavior attack is subtle; it may take the form of attempting to remove the mainstreamed child from one's class, or may involve actively working with the child to meet her needs. It may thus represent either a negative or positive approach to the stressful condition. Behavior that avoids the threatening agent is also considered active; it is illustrated in the teacher who denies that Sally is any different and continues to function as if Sally's disability did not exist. Avoidance might be indirectly positive in situations where the individual is able to sidestep the responsibility of dealing with a mainstreamed child, allowing others more willing or capable to take on the challenge.

Cognitive reappraisal consists of reinterpreting one's situation when initial direct actions are not successful or not possible. Negative reappraisals might consist of blaming others (the school administration, government policy, etc.) or rationalizing (I don't have the time, the materials, etc.). Positive reappraisal would include recognizing more positive aspects of the situation and working constructively to cope with whatever conditions exist. Understanding that how one can institute an individualized instructional program that never seemed to get started before, or create a peer tutoring program, which had always seemed desirable, but never necessary would illustrate a positive reappraisal of the stressful situation.

The third type of long-term response to stress is anxiety, or a feeling of helplessness and weakness. Selye (1956) believed that anxiety is a fundamental response to stress and is an early sign that something must be done to combat the threat. Recent researchers such as Shontz (1975) argue that some degree of anxiety accompanies every change from one type of situation to another, even when change is progressive and growth-oriented. Transitory anxiety is therefore to be expected whenever stress occurs. Anxiety is a strong force for cognitive

change and cognitive reappraisal provides the foundation for planning direct actions. Thus the three forms of long-term reactions to stress may work coincidentally.

Like most human psychological reactions, the three reactions to stress can be learned, and therefore can be managed. The last part of this paper will address the issue of how the stress created by problems associated with mainstreaming can be effectively managed. We will examine the implications of the mainstreaming concept in terms of recommended changes in the educational system and in recommendations to the individual teacher.

Stress Reduction - The Role of the System

1. Increased training. As already suggested, most regular classroom teachers require increased training particularly in the areas of characteristics of handicapped conditions and instructional provisions for handicapped learners. Knowing what particular children can do, as well and what they cannot do, and what types of modifications to instruction are necessary, will allow the positive reappraisal that can lead to the removal of stress. Particularly important is what Stedman (1983) calls transdisciplinary training on how to use other disciplines. This will allow educational staff to respond to handicapped individuals on a variety of dimensions and will encourage the use of and reliance on other specialists. The availability of support services and technical assistance has been identified as a major concern of teachers of mainstreamed children (Keogh and Levitt, 1976).

2. De-emphasize procedural requirements. Reynolds and Wang (1983) feel that a general effect of the federal role in education has been an increase in the procedural requirements placed upon teachers and school administrators. These requirements include the preparation of IEP's, the issuance of formal notices to, as well as the scheduling of individual meetings with parents. A kind of litigious atmosphere has been created by the over-emphasis on procedure which tends to

heighten distrust between teachers and parents. Such an emphasis distracts from the education of children and contributes to the feeling of helplessness and "inability to get everything done" that teachers undergoing stress report.

3. Facilitate placement and re-placement decisions. Adequate diagnosis and placement recommendations are necessary for regular classroom teachers to plan adequate instruction. There has been a long history of discussion and research on the establishment of categories of special education placement. Concern has been voiced over misdiagnosis, such as placement of children with behavior disorders in mentally handicapped categories, cultural bias in testing, the effects of category labels, and the inability of some children to ever leave their orginal classification. Time does not permit examination of those issues here, except to say the kind of reappraisal described as necessary for adaptation to stress is difficult to do when initial information about children supplied by others in erroneous. School psychologists and others involved in placement decisions must make recommendations based on accurate data, not on convenience. While such a statement seems obvious, too often it is violated.

The re-classification issue is also important to our consideration. Allowing children to move from a handicapped classification to regular status is not only important to the child's self-image, but reinforcing to the teachers involved. Failure to see tangible signs of progress in a child's overcoming a disability contributes to a sense of inadequacy in teachers. Perhaps a compulsory reintegration policy in which children are automatically reassigned to a regular school schedule at the end of the year (except for obvious cases) would be a desirable innovation in many programs. Hewitt (1972) has reported that 20% of those reassigned in a California school district are never referred back. Regular classroom teachers report feeling a sense of responsibility for individual children, control over who is in their classroom, and a renewed challenge to help children improve academically and socially following this policy.

4. Provision of information to influence teacher expectations. Not only do teachers need accurate placement recommendations, but they require information about what a child's performance can be, and what instructional procedures are most likely to be effective with him. The effect of teacher expectations has been widely documented. Teachers behave in ways that maximize the achievements of students for whom they hold high expectations and minimize the achievements of low-expectation students. Positive information about handicapped children is likely to have a beneficial effect on teacher's attitudes in that the focus is placed on strengths and potential, not on inadequacies and failure. Those submitting diagnostic and referral recommendations to teachers should always include prescriptive information leading to some type of optimistic outcome, however limited.

Stress Reduction - The Role of the Individual Teacher

1. Know your own standards and limits. Hewett (1972) believes that every teacher has a range of tolerance for behavioral and academic differences among her pupils. A crucial determiner of whether a given handicapped child will survive and succeed in a regular classroom is whether he falls within the individual range of tolerance of a particular teacher. Likewise, whether a teacher will be able to successfully cope with the stress of instructing a handicapped child depends on whether that child is within her range of tolerance. While it is crucial that schools make the best possible placement of mainstreamed children, it is also important that teachers identify the types of children they are most successful with and communicate that clearly to school personnel. This recommendation applies to those who tend to accept too many mainstreamed children as well; there are limits of tolerance for even the most accepting of teachers.

2. Analyze your view of your instructional role. Does a teacher view himself as an academic specialist concerned with imparting knowledge or that of a

socialization agent, interested in affective and social growth? Does the teacher aspire to high academic achievement for all students, or to help children to achieve whatever their potential may be? Many of the teachers who report expe-riencing stress in the process of educating mainstreamed children, admit frustra-tion when their students do not reach academic goals. If one sees oneself as a socialization agent,one is more likely to feel less thwarted or incompetent when students fail to achieve according to some external standard. Teachers need to conceptualize their positions not in terms of "curing" the handicapped learner, or overcoming the handicap, but in terms of the specific help the child needs to live and learn in the classroom setting (Morse, 1972).

3. Establish an organized system of monitoring the behavior of mainstreamed students. After a handicapped learner is placed in the classroom, her academic and social behavior must be monitored carefully and frequently to insure that proposed programmatic changes are having their intended effect. Assessments provide direct information to a regular classroom teacher on the quality of a child's behavior, a judgment that teachers do not always make accurately when they rely on subjectively derived information (Hersh and Walker, 1983). A data-based system for more efficiently recording and analyzing information is de-sirable. The process of translating a child's behavior into observable data not only can improve understanding and provide evidence for the reappraisal needed to adapt to stress but also is likely to allay anxiety. Improvements that may go undetected can be noted, and many times the great differences one expects in the mainstreamed child from regular class students may prove to be less dramatic than expected.

4. Establish a teaching team. Sharing the pressures of a stressful situa-tion is one way in which teachers in similar circumstances can successfully adapt. By recognizing that others are facing the same types of problems, one is able to lose the sense of uniqueness and paranoia that often characterizes the individual who is failing to cope. The recent literature on effective schools

identifies sharing and the interchange of ideas and of responsibility as a characteristic of successful educational programs. The formation of a team composed of school psychologist, principal, regular classroom teachers, resource teacher and other specialists is important in working with individual children. A team of regular classroom teachers however, where one teacher with special competence might work with selected groups of children in one subject matter area while another handles the larger group in a different activity, provides a special type of support. Such a sharing of responsibility shifts the responsibility of the education of a handicapped child from one set of shoulders to several.

In summary, the process of adapting to the stress produced by the placement of a handicapped learner in a regular teacher's classroom can be eliminated by both effective procedures within the educational system, and by a cognitive reappraisal of one's role, the learner and his potential, and one's instructional procedures. While the recommendations above may be easy to advocate but more difficult to implement, they all seem crucial to a positive adaptation to stress.

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